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RENEWAL FOR VOLUNTARY  
ORGANIZATIONS

by

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Ottawa

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Renewal is the term suggested by the National Advisory Council on Voluntary Action to describe the subject of this paper. Others might have been appropriate, like "revitalization", or "regeneration" or "a shot in the arm". For our purposes, renewal does mean those things; it implies a healthy past from which voluntary organizations can build (i.e. to re-establish; to renew, as in promise<sup>i</sup>). This paper's definition rejects a need to break with or ignore the past, as does another interpretation from Webster "to begin again".<sup>ii</sup>

We start with an important assumption: that the case for voluntary organizations in community action and human services can be clearly demonstrated and that the National Advisory Council on Voluntary Action will do so.

This paper attempts to deal with the ways voluntary organizations can strengthen themselves, and how the Federal Government can assist. It concentrates on voluntary organizations which operate with staff and it deals mainly with the role of the volunteer as board member, citizen participant in the policy making of voluntary, human services outside the arts, sport or ethnic communities.

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i - Webster's New World Dictionary  
ii - Webster's New World Dictionary

The author has been asked to draw essentially on his own professional and board experiences (in Winnipeg and Ottawa), including 10 years in public service with the Manitoba government, 12 years in the voluntary sector with the Social Planning Council of Ottawa-Carleton.

Besides calling on his professional and board experiences, the author has had formal discussions with a number of key people (See Appendix I), concerned with the future of voluntary organizations and with how the Federal Government's role might develop. Further, conversations were held with people who are currently using some of the renewal methods outlined, particularly exchange and sabbaticals - to see how effective they are and what benefits result.

Finally, some principles will be stated and some recommendations will be made concerning an exchange of resources within the voluntary sector and between it and universities and the Federal Government.

#### Opportunities for Renewal and Attitudes to the Voluntary Sector

Short of declaring an organization to be irrelevant, disbanding the board, discharging the staff and starting all over with new people to do something entirely different, there are

no mysterious or exciting ways to renew organizations. What becomes clear, however, is that there are a number of sensible methods which voluntary organizations have had limited opportunities to try - with Federal Government attitudes partly responsible for the problem.

The antagonism towards "established" voluntary organizations which flourished in the federal government in the late 60's and early 70's has diminished somewhat. The obsession of funding bodies (like L.I.P. and O.F.Y.) with innovativeness is gone. The labels which used to be attached to voluntary organizations; "irrelevant", "band-aid", "establishment", etc., are less in evidence. The creation of the National Advisory Council on Voluntary Action was a major step in the right direction. But those earlier attitudes have not yet been replaced with any marked enthusiasm for the voluntary sector.

In the minds of strategically placed bureaucrats, there is still too much confusion between private (as in exclusive) and voluntary - as though voluntary agencies really did exist to prevent "stronger action by governments by simply existing as an excuse for a lack of government intervention".<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Brief to the Senate Committee on Poverty from the Company of Young Canadians, May 8, 1969, pp. 132-133



### Methods of Renewal

#### 1) Rotation:

a) Although rotating board membership is a wide-spread practice, there are still a number of voluntary organizations who stand pat. They may think they're in the groove, rather than in a rut. Possibly some of them remain contemporary and vital, but it's unlikely. Funding bodies (federal, provincial, municipal governments, United Way(s)) should insist on rotation formulas that increase representativeness and participation.

Rotation may produce the same kind of people with different names, hence it's no guarantee for wider representation. Nor does it ensure renewal, but its absence almost certainly produces stagnation.

b) Staff Rotation: There are few examples where major staff roles are rotated for the purpose of organizational renewal. Chairmanships in some university departments do rotate but generally so that a thankless task can be shared around. Those who are promoted are given a raise in pay to cover the increased administrative responsibilities.

Voluntary organizations don't have access to increased funds for such purposes. And it's unlikely many of them would have



senior staff willing to rotate or exchange responsibilities for a reduction in salary. But why, in our society, must those with the most prestigious titles and managerial responsibilities always have to have the highest salaries? Our system denies mature staff the opportunity, even temporarily, say for a year, to step sideways or down, to renew themselves.

Organizations should be encouraged to experiment with a staff rotation system not related to financial punishment and reward; for stepping sideways, down or up.

## 2) Representation

How representative are the boards of directors of voluntary organizations? In most cases, they provide a better balance between men and women and language, generation, economic, professional and consumer interests than municipal councils, provincial assemblies or the federal government. And it isn't difficult for them to make themselves even more representative, a process which can lead to renewal.

Over the past decade, a serious movement has taken place in voluntary organizations to include people on boards of directors (the "decision-making process") who will be affected by the decisions of the particular organizations. The terminology changes from time to time: "clients", "citizens",

(reserved for those on low-incomes), "the residents", "consumers". Whatever the name and in spite of the charges of tokenism tediously levelled when changes aren't total, the process has frequently contributed to the revitalizations of organizations.

Not surprisingly, when consumers in sufficient numbers are chosen for their leadership and articulateness (rather than their anger and outspokenness) they make voluntary organizations more credible and more effective.

Conversely, when voluntary organizations resist the infusion of a new kind of blood into their mainstream, they should be held in suspicion by those who support them financially.

Unfortunately, funding bodies, out of a misguided respect for the autonomy of voluntary organizations, are reluctant to set standards for board representativeness. They can set the physical and health standards for services the boards of directors are empowered to deliver and the qualifications of the professionals the directors will hire. They do almost nothing to ensure that boards entrusted with public dollars are representative of the communities from which the funds come and where they'll be spent. But funding bodies should have those rights. Most voluntary organizations seeking public support (governmental or private funding) see board representativeness as a positive feature they consciously seek.



### RETREAT

There are very few opportunities for directors and staff in voluntary agencies to develop close working relationships. Board and committee meetings once or twice a month (less December, July and August) are the rule. One valuable method of improving the situation is for them to go into seclusion together, away from the telephone and their offices and family responsibilities for a day or two. With sound planning, say 4 - 6 months in advance many volunteers would give up the time to take a hard look at the organization they're serving. But there are almost never any funds for such purposes. Food and shelter have to be provided, because the time the volunteers will be donating is precious; to ask them to contribute financially is unreasonable.

The "retreat" idea is an attractive one in the voluntary sector. It can be accomplished through commitment and planning, both of which are evident in a number of organizations, plus funds for modest accommodations, which are not.

### TRAVEL

One hears it so often in the voluntary field it must be true: when board and staff travel to a conference together, they come away with a much better understanding of what they represent, how it relates to other communities, what new strategies they should develop back home, etc.

And yet, other than salaries, there is no item in any organization's budget which is scrutinized so suspiciously and slashed so sharply. At least that's the way it is in the United Way movement. During times of restraint (which are constant) the donor must be seen to be protected from the costs of a Grey Cup atmosphere which might threaten community service conventions and meetings.

Legitimate travel for board and staff together should be seen and promoted as a useful opportunity for renewal. The National Advisory Council can take a stand to promote it. Funds will always flow slowly for travel purposes, but voluntary organizations should be encouraged to seek them with more enthusiasm and less guilt.

#### EXCHANGE

a) With Government: According to one public servant questioned for this paper, the federal government is well aware of what is going on in the voluntary field. But that was not the opinion expressed by James Heffel, one of the very few federal government employees to go to a voluntary organization by way of the Interchange Canada program.<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Heffel is now Acting Director of Personnel for the Children's Aid Society of Ottawa-Carleton; he was formerly Manager, Human Resource Planning and Staffing Division, Federal Department of Labor.

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<sup>1</sup> Interchange Canada is a program developed by the Public Service Commission. As at September 1st, 1976, there had been 165 exchanges arranged between the Federal Government and industry, provincial governments, universities, etc. The average length of exchanged employment is 2 years.



Mr. Heffel says federal bureaucrats do "not have a clue about voluntary agencies" which, in his terms "are completely different" from the federal government because they allow staff to "operate as a team" and become "much more deeply involved" in the affairs of the organization.

He is very enthusiastic about his experience, describes it as "extremely healthy", "enlightening". He feels that his experience with Children's Aid would be very useful to take back to government because the style of operations possible in a voluntary organization could "cut government red tape in half".

Equally enthusiastic about the exchange is the executive director of the agency. Joe Messner claims Mr. Heffel brings an expertise in personnel and labour relations not available in the voluntary field.

Unfortunately Interchange Canada is not that easy to negotiate. It generally requires organizations involved in exchanges to compensate the government for the employee's full salary. Further, the average length of an exchange is 2 years.

But even if Interchange Canada cannot be heavily exploited by voluntary organizations, more modest exchanges would be welcome and very beneficial. Aside from some minor bureaucratic

resistance from Government ("our work is so confidential", "the pressure here would get in the way of us paying much attention to observers", etc.) one detects some enthusiasm at senior staff levels to get on with the job of cross-fertilization.

Opportunities for short term exchanges, one week to a month are not hard to organize. They require commitment to the idea and its promotion.

b) Exchanges between Voluntary Agencies at the board and staff levels:

As simple as this would seem to be at the local level, it rarely occurs. Because voluntary organizations lack financial resources to tackle some of the more ambitious renewal methods, they give too little attention to valuable opportunities to learn from one another. Caught up in their own affairs, they take too little time to stand back and observe how things are done in sister organizations across town.

Shouldn't boards of directors occasionally observe each other in action and compare notes? Of course they should. There's nothing more required to make this happen than agreement that it would have value, commitment to the idea and promotion of it, particularly by umbrella organizations like United Way(s) and social planning councils.



A solid example of this takes place in Montreal where the National Council of Jewish Women, la Fédération des Femmes du Québec and the Montreal Council of Women each send five representatives once a month to the connecting link the three organizations formed, le Comité conjoint. Our informant, Shirley Kossman (Vice President, National Council of Jewish Women) claims the experience has been invaluable.

c) Exchanges with Universities

Universities have done little to inform or educate students about the value of voluntary organizations. Generally speaking, the faculty whose students on graduation will have the most to do with volunteers and voluntary services is social work. Yet, social work in the past 15 years has gone through two major phases both of which have tended to ignore, if not reject, the role of volunteers in direct service or as policy makers.

In the earlier, Freudian casework phase, volunteers were downgraded or belittled because they were "untrained", therefore mere dabblers, a potentially dangerous force to inflict on the poor, the disturbed, etc.

The role of volunteer as board member was generally ignored, except possibly for a short (3 - 5 minute ) reference in one class in Social Service Administration, invariably an unexciting and relatively unpopular course.

In the recent switch in emphasis from casework to social policy, schools of social work have continued their obliviousness to volunteers, but for different reasons. The Freudian school generally saw problems as individual and related to weaknesses in one's ego caused by parent-child relations and consequently too complicated a territory for a mere volunteer to enter. The Social Policy school sees problems as socio-economic, the solution political and so individual help isn't required, "trained" or otherwise - indeed individual help is frequently seen as an unproductive diversion away from the global solutions required.

Schools of social work and university facilities in general, have also subscribed to the view that "established" voluntary organizations inhibit the development of appropriate government action.

But there are some bright spots. Dr. Brian Segal of the Carleton University School of Social Work describes voluntary organizations this way: "Social agencies and citizens groups may be the best organizations to deal with real community problems with skill, economy of scale and effectiveness".<sup>i</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> "Social Policy in the Face of Despair: The Manpower Training Challenge". A Paper presented at Learned Society Meetings to the Canadian Association of Schools of Social Work Annual Meeting, Quebec City, May, 1976.



In the writer's opinion there's no maybe about it.

Segal also says: "....one of the ways of coping with bigness, gangling and pudgy government structures is through the existence of local voluntary social agencies acting as countervailing forces".

Segal talks about the role of the university in helping to train those who will direct voluntary services. But the voluntary sector might be suspicious because it will have trouble finding a history of respect for its accomplishments in the training resources of universities and particularly schools of social work.

What is required is an exchange between the voluntary sector and the university to strengthen the relationship.

Money need not change hands. Staff and volunteers welcome opportunities to describe their programs to classes in human service faculties.<sup>i</sup>

Similarly, voluntary organizations have a right to expect university faculty members to contribute a good deal of time and energy to them.

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<sup>i</sup> The writer has directed a course, "Corrections and the Community" for a number of years at the University of Ottawa Department of Criminology. Board and staff from the voluntary sector are principal lecturers; fees are not an issue.

It can be argued that a good deal of this kind of exchange does take place.

What is missing are opportunities for faculties and voluntary organizations to exchange resources, even temporarily. What substitutes now for exchange and the development of positive relationships is a commercial arrangement where the university engages someone from the voluntary sector as part-time (and paid) lecturer (probably a decreasing prospect in the light of PhD. requirements) or voluntary organizations seek out solitary faculty members to consult, to pick their brains - with mutual benefit in both cases a minor objective.

What is required are short-term but full-time opportunities for exchange, people moving physically from the university into the offices of the voluntary organization and vice versa - to observe, react, influence and become renewed.

#### STUDY

It's not easy to produce formal, educational opportunities for program volunteers or board members. Their time is at a premium; few could afford full-time immersion in university or community college studies for the purpose of preparing or renewing themselves for voluntary organization service. But part-time or evening courses are feasible and have been

developed on ad hoc bases in a number of Canadian communities. There's an unfortunate general premise to such courses: the volunteers have everything to learn; the faculty has everything to teach. What's lacking are consistent, collaborative exchanges between the voluntary organizations and academic institutions - to develop mutual respect and increased expectations.

The voluntary sector has a right to expect that the resources of universities and community colleges can be exploited to train and sensitize volunteers (program aides or board members). It has a further right to expect that educational institutions providing such training will do so out of an understanding of the positive traditions and contributions of the voluntary sector; put another way, a right to expect training courses for volunteers to be built on the attitudes expressed by Segal, not the "band-aid" rhetoric of recent years.

### Sabbaticals

Increasingly voluntary organizations are introducing extended leaves of absence and sabbaticals into their personnel practices, not too difficult to arrange in organizations where there is more than 5 or 6 staff but hard to provide in services where the staff is small, say in a one or two woman Elizabeth Fry Society. But if voluntary services want to retain experienced



personnel, they must commit themselves to providing staff with opportunities for renewal.

Copying the university model (generally a one year's leave at 2/3 salary every 7 years) is neither essential nor appropriate. Voluntary organizations can invent all kinds of new personnel practices.

One that did is the Family Service Centre of Ottawa-Carleton which allowed its experienced executive director to work for one year at a much reduced level of pressure (but at reduced salary). Its President, Ruth Addison (a retired Public Service Commissioner) states that the organization introduced the measure because its executive director Evelyn McCorkell did "not have enough time to stop and think".

Miss McCorkell is positive about her experience but feels that a shorter period completely away from the organization would have been preferable.

The Social Planning Council of Ottawa-Carleton has introduced sabbaticals of four months with full pay for all staff (professional and administrative) after 10 years. A small achievement in comparison with university standards but an important opportunity for renewal all the same.

### SELF-STUDY

With or without the assistance of paid consultants, self-study can be a very useful method of renewal. It allows organizations to take in-depth looks at themselves, and in an open, collective way. The "self" in the method, however, can threaten objectivity; the hiring of outside researchers does not guarantee it.

One method that has rarely if ever been tried, is for a number of organizations to get together and agree that each will evaluate one of the others, with the general criteria worked out in advance. The process, one which would obviously involve board and staff, would cost nothing more than time and although it would lack in research sophistication, it could have exceptional benefits: more objectivity than an internal self-study; increased awareness of the value of evaluation; increased ability to develop evaluation skills.

What one detects in the voluntary sector is only minor enthusiasm for evaluation and its inevitable consequences, criticism and change. The reasons are numerous:

- 1) criticism is painful, why invite it?
- 2) volunteers give their time, concern and energy, is criticism even justified?

- 3) to suggest change is to suggest that what one is currently doing is inadequate; volunteers "need" a feeling of success (this is the major explanation for some United Way campaign goals being less than the real needs of the voluntary services: volunteer campaigners need to feel that what they are raising is all that needs to be raised.)
- 4) evaluation has generally not been seen to be objective nor scientific nor constructive; those practicing the "art", professional evaluators all too frequently have little or no experience and hence no credibility in the fields they're surveying;
- 5) funds to purchase competent professional assistance have been difficult to obtain.

There are increasing skills being developed in the area of program evaluation (particularly in universities) and so the obtaining of professional consultation and assistance is generally an asset. Two organizations (without professional staff) who use this method to advantage are the National Council of Jewish Women and the Junior League. Along with the majority of the voluntary sector, neither are fundamentally opposed to the use of public funds to pay for evaluation-renewal opportunities.

The limited availability of such funds will be discussed later.



DEMONSTRATION AND JOB CREATION PROGRAMS

Voluntary organizations who have not been involved with federal demonstration or job creation programs have missed rare opportunities for renewal. L.I.P., O.F.Y., Student Community Service, New Horizons, and Welfare Demonstration grants are some of the major programs that have given voluntary organizations new people, new ideas and new directions.

A preoccupation with their own perceptions of innovativeness in some federal departments has limited the opportunities of "established" voluntary organizations to participate in some of the programs. The creation of the Committee of National Voluntary Organizations came about partly as a response to that situation; presumably the establishment of the National Advisory Council on Voluntary Action did too.

Some resistance to established voluntary organizations was justified. Given federal funds unconditionally, they would pursue their traditional employment practices, recruiting the best professionals money could buy. Hiring the young, the unemployed, the disadvantaged would be a relatively low priority. On the other hand, with prospects for new federal money, there is little resistance in the voluntary sector to hiring people out of an employment pool created by the federal

government; a simple matching of voluntary needs and federal resources but one that was too frequently ignored in the early days of federal job creation programs.

While there has been an increase in opportunities for voluntary organizations to obtain some of the new blood that federal job creation programs provide, there is little evidence that the federal government sees the voluntary sector as a major training ground. Funding voluntary organizations through job creation opportunities is seen as: (1) providing useful employment for those out-of-work and (2) assistance to the organizations. What's missing is an attitude on the part of the federal funders that besides offering "useful" employment and a salary, the voluntary sector can provide an unbureaucratic and exciting learning experience for those working in it. The Secretary of State's Student Community Service Program would appear to be an exception in that it consciously seeks opportunities for summer student employees in established, voluntary community services.

#### FEDERAL GOVERNMENT RESOURCES

It's interesting to compare the attitudes towards volunteers and voluntary organizations one finds in the federal government and its agencies, in sports, the arts, the ethnic communities, social services and citizens organizations.

In sport, the national voluntary organizations are recognized as the only viable means of delivering essential sports administration services, and their volunteer directors are seen as the backbone and the heart of the operation. Volunteers are respected, honoured and sometimes rewarded.

In the arts, different attitudes are found. For example: in referring to the role of the paid executive director in a voluntary artistic company, Peter Swann writes: "Remember that the director, exposed as he is, must accept the main responsibility for the results...."<sup>i</sup>

And, "In the main, boards of directors rarely exhibit the competence necessary to choose, for example, an artistic director".<sup>ii</sup>

In the national voluntary sports organizations in Canada, the executive director would unquestionably be chosen by the voluntary board - no other source of competence would be seen to exist. In the arts, directors are still "patrons". Not surprisingly, renewal opportunities for volunteers, travel, retreat, exchange, evaluation, etc. are in direct relation to the perceived roles of the volunteers in those two areas of involvement.

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<sup>i</sup> Readings on the Governing Boards of Arts Organizations: Canada Council 1971, page 30. Peter C. Swann, Director, Royal Ontario Museum, Keynote Address to the Ontario Association of Art Galleries Toronto, November 27, 1970.

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid: "The Acceptable Few" a memo by Tom Hendry, former Director of the Canadian Theatre Centre.



Sport Canada generously funds opportunities for renewal; pays for one international trip for each volunteer governing body annually; insists on an appraisal process for the volunteer sports' associations it funds and is able to pay for evaluation, research, and professional consultation required. Sports Canada is pleased when its national, voluntary organizations take the initiative to seek resources for self-evaluation. Finally, Sports Canada seems to consciously concern itself with renewal opportunities for volunteers by "recycling" them in umbrella organizations, international associations, etc.

The Canada Council on the other hand has never funded a conference of volunteer directors of artistic companies, and sees funding a retreat of artists and board members together as outside its mandate. Interestingly, if a voluntary organization such as the Calgary YWCA wished to celebrate a special occasion, say its 75th birthday, it would be eligible to apply to the Canada Council for an Explorations Program to hire a historian to trace its development.

The situation for ethnic organizations is closer to the arts than it is to sport. One gets the impression that multiculturalism with federal support is so new that only the oldest, established organizations sense any need for renewal resources. If they do, however, there are few opportunities to pursue their interest. The Multicultural Program is essentially concerned

with projects to promote an organization's cultural heritage. The concept of organizational renewal hasn't been given much attention, although research studies for program evaluation would be outside the terms of reference of the Program.

Welfare Grants (Health and Welfare Canada) provides major renewal assistance to voluntary services through opportunities such as demonstration projects (new tasks, new directions for old organizations) advanced educational opportunities for senior staff (sabbaticals, etc.) and funds for professional consultation and evaluation of programs. Outside its terms of reference are retreats and costs for training volunteers that would include travel, lodgings, etc.

Prospects for renewal are not bright in the Assistance to Community Groups Program in the Department of the Secretary of State. Voluntary organizations do have access to funds to purchase professional consultation for self-study and development but opportunities for travel and exchange are rare and retreat non-existent.

#### SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There are 8 identifiable methods by which voluntary organizations can renew themselves; rotation; representation; retreat; travel; exchange; study (education); self-study; demonstration and job creation programs.

The first two, board rotation and board representativeness are elementary and should be considered to be essential characteristics of voluntary organizations. What is required from voluntary organizations is commitment to those concepts. It would be helpful if the National Advisory Council would promote those concepts and the right of funding bodies to insist on their application in voluntary organizations.

Insofar as exchange is concerned (with government and with universities, community colleges) commitment to the idea is the major requirement, with subsequent contributions of time and energy the inevitable consequences for both parties to the exchange. Here again promotion of the idea is essential; funding is not.

For retreat, travel, study and self-study, funding is an issue. One can understand the reluctance of federal government agencies to get involved in supporting what could appear to be luxurious "escapes" for board members. However, it's ironic that while funds do exist for voluntary organizations to hire professional evaluators for generous fees, funds are almost impossible to obtain for "retreat", a method of renewal that demands far more self-help, time and energy and costs considerably less. (A local organization could take a total of 30 board and staff members to an out-of-town retreat for 2 days and one night for less than \$1500.)



It's important for the National Advisory Council to develop a stance about the value of renewal and the increasing appropriateness of public funding for those renewal methods which require it, retreat, travel, study and self-study.

In demonstration and job creation programs, there have been very useful initiatives taken by the federal government, to the advantage of the voluntary sector. It's in this area of organizational renewal that exceptional opportunities for improvement in the relationship between government and the voluntary sector can be found.

The federal government has a huge resource, the unemployed - people with important needs. The voluntary sector has a great resource too, its ability to provide creative employment and it has important needs as well - jobs that need doing.

The National Advisory Council on Voluntary Action should play a major role in focussing on the importance of bringing these needs and resources together.

## APPENDIX I

People who contributed to this Report through formal interview, telephone discussions or brief conversations are:

Ruth Addison, President, Family Service Centre of Ottawa

Reuben Baetz, Executive Director, Canadian Council on Social Development

Suzanne Blais-Grenier, Director, National Welfare Grants, Health and  
Welfare Canada

Micheline Chaput, Executive Office, Arts Division, Canada Council

Carol Fleming, Past President, Junior League of Calgary

Stewart Goodings, Director General, Citizenship Policy, Department of the  
Secretary of State.

Jim Heffel, Director of Personnel, Children's Aid Society of Ottawa

Dr. Stanley Kalinowsky, Acting Manager, Sports Canada  
Fitness and Amateur Sport Branch  
Health and Welfare Canada

Shirley Kossman, Vice-President, National Council of Jewish Women  
and Member, National Advisory Council on Voluntary Action

Paul Emile Leblanc, Assistant to the Associate Director, Canada Council

Lewis Levin, National Coordinator for Student Community Service Programs  
Department of the Secretary of State

Evelyn McCorkell, Executive Director, Family Service Centre of Ottawa

Joseph Messner, Executive Director, Children's Aid Society of Ottawa

Arthur New, Assistant Director, Assistance to Community Groups Programs  
Department of the Secretary of State

Susan Scotti, Special Assistant to the Honourable John Munro,  
Minister Responsible for Multiculturalism

Bryan Watson, Coordinator, Interchange Canada  
Public Service Commission of Canada





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